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# Exhuming The CIA's Nazis

THE BELARUS SECRET. By John Loftus. Edited by Nathan Miller. Knopf. 196 pp. \$13.95

By DAVID WISE

A LONG TIME AGO, I sat with Frank G. Wisner in his law office in Washington and then around the corner at lunch in a fancy M Street restaurant, listening to him boast how he had, almost single-handedly, overthrown the government of Guatemala.

He also told me how, as the CIA's man in charge of the Guatemala operation, he had even arranged for the appointment of the American ambassador, John E. Peurifoy, so that the agency would have the right sort of diplomat in place to preside over the coup. After President Eisenhower's election, Wisner explained, Peurifoy had lost his political backing. "He was on the beach and we picked him up."

For years, Frank Wisner, a husky, bald, tough-looking man, well over six feet, had been a top covert operator for the Central Intelligence Agency. He was powerful. He could, just as he claimed, overthrow a government or appoint a United States ambassador. Not your average, everyday sort of luncheon partner. Wisner, in fact, bore roughly the same paternal relationship to Cold War covert operations that Edward Teller does to the hydrogen bomb.

That day long ago, Wisner also talked on about how he had, after 1948, headed the Office of Policy Coordination, a covert action organization with an innocuous title of his own making. He did not mention, however, that as head of OPC he secretly brought into the United States scores of Nazi collaborators—some of the most vicious war criminals ever to serve Adolf Hitler's Thousand Year Reich—to form the core of a secret army that Wisner planned to unleash against the Soviet Union.

It remained for John Loftus, a young former attorney for the Justice Department, to uncover that story in his shocking and disturbing book, *The Belarus Secret*. And what a story it is: how, in defiance of the law and presidential directives, Byelorussian Nazis who had actually served in the Belarus Brigade of the notorious Waffen SS

were smuggled into the United States by an intelligence agency; how their dossiers were laundered, sometimes with the complicity of the FBI and the Immigration and Naturalization Service, so that they might settle in America for obscure and ultimately ludicrous clandestine schemes. And how finally, when Congress and the Justice Department began to dig into the story years later, a mysterious coverup took place. Unseen hands were at work. The Nazis' files could not be found; normally efficient Pentagon computers somehow failed to locate the incriminating records sitting in the government's archives.

Many of the murderers imported by Frank Wisner and the CIA lived out peaceful lives in America, the land of the free, and are buried in a small graveyard in South River, New Jersey, a Byelorussian community off the New Jersey Turnpike about 30 miles south of midtown Manhattan. Some of the suspected Nazis are still alive and the subject of current investigations by the Justice Department, for whom Loftus had worked as coordinator of the Belarus project.

Byelorussia, also known as White Russia, is one of the republics of the U.S.S.R. It is about the size of Minnesota and lies just to the east of the Polish border. When the Nazis occupied Byelorussia during World War II, they set up a puppet government there under Radislaw Ostrowsky. The loyalty test for the Byelorussian collaborators was how enthusiastically they participated in the slaughter of the large Jewish population. Only those who aided the *Einsatzgruppen*, the Gestapo's mobile killing squads, passed the test. The Byelorussians brought great enthusiasm to the task. "Children were thrown into wells and hand grenades dropped down upon them, and Byelorussian policemen swung infants by the heels and smashed their heads against rocks."

One of the top Quislings was Stanislaw Stankievich, the "Butcher of Borissov." In 1941, Stankievich, whom the Nazis had put in charge of the town, ordered 7,000 men, women, and children—virtually all the Jewish population—killed. They were forced to jump into pits and were shot from above, one layer of bodies covering the next.

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In the town of Kletsk, a leading collaborator, Emanuel Jasiuk, was appointed mayor by the Nazis. In 1942, he murdered 5,000 Jews in a single day. Large trenches were dug and men, women, and children herded into them. As Loftus tells it:

"A small detachment of Germans and specially selected Byelorussians accomplished the actual execution. Guards were left atop the graves until the ground stopped trembling and the muffled cries were still. There was no chance for anyone to crawl out."

Emanuel Jasiuk is buried in an unmarked grave in the cemetery in South River, New Jersey, near the grave of Radislaw Ostrowsky. Stanislaw Stankievich died peacefully in his bed in Queens, New York, a year ago. The honor roll of the CIA's Nazis is much longer than that. When the CBS television program *60 Minutes* interviewed Loftus last spring, they reported that 300 Nazi collaborators were brought to America; but the number may be much higher, Loftus suggests.

Wisner's OPC was a hybrid; it received its funding from CIA but was hidden in the State Department. At its height in 1952, Wisner had 4,000 agents in OPC in 47 stations around the globe, and a budget of \$82 million. And no one controlled it. Eventually, in the 1950s, OPC was absorbed into what is now CIA's Directorate of Operations, the agency's cloak-and-dagger arm.

As Wisner conceived it, his Nazis were to form the nucleus of an underground liberation army that would be targeted against the governments of Eastern Europe and roll back the Iron Curtain. For help, Wisner turned to Reinhard Gehlen, who had been Hitler's military intelligence expert on the Soviet Union, and whom the CIA set up as head of West Germany's spy organization after the war. Wisner's plan for an underground army was, as Loftus puts it, "romantic and absurdly impractical."

For one thing, the Byelorussian and other Eastern European émigrés were riddled with Soviet spies. When some of Wisner's warriors were parachuted into the Soviet Union, they were quickly captured and executed. For assistance in screening out Soviet agents among the émigrés, Wisner, according to Loftus, went to, of all people, Kim Philby, head of Soviet affairs for British intelligence and, as it later turned out, a master mole for the KGB.

Yet Wisner's plans marched forward. "Millions of dollars in gold, bank notes, arms, and equipment were smuggled into Poland" in one ill-fated operation alone. By 1952, OPC "was consuming more than half the CIA's annual budget. Wisner's private army had launched an

undeclared war against the Soviet Union." By 1955, however, he was no longer operating as a loner; that year, the National Security Council officially, albeit secretly, authorized the CIA and Wisner to incite revolts against the Soviet Union in Eastern Europe.

None of it succeeded; only the CIA's Nazis benefited, building comfortable new lives in America (some got jobs with Radio Liberty, a CIA front), their murderous pasts sanitized courtesy of the U.S. government. By 1965, Frank Wisner was a sick man. At his Maryland farm one afternoon, he blew his brains out with a 20-gauge shotgun. It was a tragic ending for a man who, by his own lights, at least, thought he was serving his country. His friends issued one kind of eulogy. John Loftus has written another. □

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